THE
Dan Smoot Report

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DAN SMOOT

WASHINGTON KNEW BEST

Political leaders of America pay George Washington, the Father of Our Country, the homage of an empty ritualism, while violating his principles. Congress recognizes Washington's birthday every year by reading his Farewell Address. The Address is read to the House of Representatives and to the Senate — and is, thus, printed in full twice in the *Congressional Record* every February 22. But nowhere in the programs supported by leaders of Congress is there any visible reflection of Washington's counsel.

Washington delivered his Farewell Address to the people of the United States on September 17, 1796, announcing his retirement from public life at the end of his second term as President (March, 1797), and outlining the policies which he wished the Republic would follow.

He warned against lawlessness. The people, he said, have a right to alter their "constitutions of government"; but they also have a sacred obligation to obey existing laws and constitutions until they are "changed by an explicit and authentic act of the whole people." Applied to present problems, this means that persons like Martin Luther King should be arrested and prosecuted to the full extent of existing law whenever they trespass upon private or public property, block public thoroughfares, interfere with the lawful activities of others, or incite others to unlawful acts. It means that clergymen, housewives, college students and everyone else engaged in "civil disobedience" of laws they do not like should be arrested and prosecuted. It means that quick, massive force should be used to stop all riots, even if this requires the shooting of looters, vandals, and persons assaulting firemen and policemen. It means that every union official who has any connection with a strike endangering public health and safety, damaging private property, or infringing on the personal rights of individuals, should be arrested and prosecuted — and that every striker, who uses coercion to keep someone else from doing the work he refuses to do, should be arrested and prosecuted.

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George Washington also warned that *government* should be compelled to obey the Constitution, and not permitted to change it illegally by "innovation upon its principles." If we had heeded this warning, our federal government would not today be squandering multiplied billions of our dollars on activities, harmful to our country, which the government has no constitutional authority to engage in.

George Washington urged the people to maintain the constitutional distribution of political powers, permitting "no change by usurpation." If we had followed that advice, we would not today have federal officials telling local and state governments how to operate their welfare programs, how their legislatures should be composed, how juries should be chosen, how courts should operate, how police should do their work, how roads should be built, how schools and hospitals should be run. There would be no federal autocrats telling private employers whom they must hire and how much to pay. There would be no federal dictation to private citizens about the use or sale of their own property, no federal agents to prosecute farmers for growing crops on their own land. There would be no administrative agencies, staffed with appointed personnel who usurp the legislative, administrative, and judicial powers of government — writing and administering their own laws, and punishing violators. The Supreme Court would not be a judicial oligarchy usurping the legislative powers not only of the national Congress but of state legislatures, arbitrarily and illegally changing not only the federal Constitution but the constitutions of individual states.

In 1796, George Washington, President of a weak, new nation, envisioned the time "when belligerent nations . . . will not lightly hazard the giving us provocation."

In 1968, President Johnson begged our enemy for help when North Korea seized the *Pueblo*. Mike Mansfield, majority leader of the Senate, said we should apologize to North Korea by admitting that our ship was in North Korean waters, even if such an admission is a lie.

If we had followed Washington's advice on foreign policy, America would not be policeman and Santa Claus to the world, the most despised nation on earth, the whipping boy of foreign mobs and politicians. We would not now be involved in the senseless, hopeless Vietnam war.

In this fateful political year, every American ought to read, and read well, George Washington's Farewell Address. Here is the essence of it:

"This government, the offspring of our own choice, uninfluenced and unawed, adopted upon full investigation and mature deliberation, completely free in its principles, in the distribution of its powers, uniting security with energy and containing within itself a provision for its own amendment, has a just claim to your confidence and your support. Respect for its authority, compliance with its laws, acquiescence in its measures, are duties enjoined by the fundamental maxims of true liberty. The basis of our political systems is the right of the people to make and to alter their constitutions of government. But the constitution which at any time exists, until changed by an explicit and authentic act of the whole people, is sacredly obligatory upon all. The very idea of the power and the right of the people to establish government, presupposes the duty of every individual to obey the established government. . . .

"Towards the preservation of your government and the permanency of your present happy state it is requisite, not only, that you steadily discountenance irregular opposition to its acknowledged authority, but also that you resist with care the spirit of innovation upon its principles, however specious the pretext. One method of assault may be to effect, in the forms of the constitution, alterations which will impair the energy of the system; and thus to undermine what cannot be directly overthrown. In all the changes to which you may be invited, remember that time and habit are at least as necessary to fix the true character of governments, as of other human institutions: — that experience is the surest standard by which to test the real tendency of the existing constitution of a country:—that facility in changes, upon the credit of mere hypothesis and opinion, exposes to perpetual change from the endless variety of hypothesis and opinion: and remember, especially, that for the efficient management of

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your common interests in a country so extensive as ours, a government of as much vigor as is consistent with the perfect security of liberty is indispensible. Liberty itself will find in such a government with powers properly distributed and adjusted, its surest guardian. It is, indeed, little else than a name, where the government is too feeble . . . to confine each member of the society within the limits prescribed by the laws, and to maintain all in the secure and tranquil enjoyment of the rights of person and property. . . .

"It is important likewise, that the habits of thinking in a free country should inspire caution in those intrusted with its administration, to confine themselves within their respective constitutional spheres, avoiding in the exercise of the powers of one department, to encroach upon another. The spirit of encroachment tends to consolidate the powers of all the departments in one, and thus to create, whatever the form of government, a real despotism. . . . The necessity of reciprocal checks in the exercise of political power, by dividing and distributing it into different depositories, and constituting each the guardian of the public weal against invasions of the others, has been evinced by experiments ancient and modern. . . . If, in the opinion of the people, the distribution or modification of the constitutional powers be in any particular wrong, let it be corrected by an amendment in the way which the constitution designates. — But let there be no change by usurpation; for though this, in one instance, may be the instrument of good, it is the customary weapon by which free governments are destroyed. The precedent must always greatly overbalance in permanent evil any partial or transient benefit which the use can at any time yield.

"Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. . . . Let it simply be asked, where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation *desert* the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice? and let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect, that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

"It is substantially true, that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government. . . .

"As a very important source of strength and security, cherish public credit. One method of preserving it is to use it as sparingly as possible, avoiding occasions of expense by cultivating peace, but remembering, also, that timely disbursements, to prepare for danger, frequently prevent much greater disbursements to repel it; avoiding likewise the accumulation of debt, not only by shunning occasions of expense, but by vigorous exertions, in time of peace, to discharge the debts which unavoidable wars may have occasioned, not ungenerously throwing upon posterity the burden which we ourselves ought to bear. The execution of these maxims belongs to your representatives, but it is necessary that public opinions should cooperate. . . .

"Observe good faith and justice towards all nations; cultivate peace and harmony with all. . . .

"Against the insidious wiles of foreign influence, (I conjure you to believe me fellow citizens) the jealousy of a free people ought to be *constantly* awake; since history and experience prove, that foreign influence is one of the most baneful foes of republican government. . . .

"The great rule of conduct for us, in regard to foreign nations, is, in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little *political* connection as possible. . . .

"Europe has a set of primary interests, which to us have none, or a very remote relation. Hence, she must be engaged in frequent controversies, the causes of which are essentially foreign to our concerns. Hence, therefore, it must be unwise in us to implicate ourselves, by artificial ties, in the ordinary vicissitudes of her politics, or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enmities.

"Our detached and distant situation invites and enables us to pursue a different course. If we remain one people, under an efficient government, the period is not far off when we may defy material injury from external annoyance; when we may take such an attitude as will cause the neutrality we may at any time resolve upon, to be scrupulously respected; when belligerent nations, under the impossibility of making acquisitions upon us, will not lightly hazard the

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giving us provocation, when we may choose peace or war, as our interest, guided by justice, shall counsel.

"Why forego the advantages of so peculiar a situation? Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground? Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalship, interest, humor, or caprice?

"It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliance with any portion of the foreign world. . . .

"Taking care always to keep ourselves by suitable establishments, on a respectable defensive posture, we may safely trust to temporary alliances for extraordinary emergencies.

"Harmony, and a liberal intercourse with all nations, are recommended by policy, humanity, and interest. But even our commercial policy should hold an equal and impartial hand; neither seeking nor granting exclusive favors or preferences; . . diffusing and diversifying by gentle means the streams of commerce, but forcing nothing; establishing with powers so disposed, in order to give trade a stable course, to define the rights of our merchants, and to enable the government to support them, conventional rules of intercourse, the best that present circumstances and mutual opinion will permit, but temporary, and liable to be from time to time abandoned or varied as experience and circumstances shall dictate; constantly keeping in view, that it is folly in one nation to look for disinterested favors from another; that it must pay with a portion of its independence for whatever it may accept under that character; that by such acceptance, it may place itself in the condition of having given equivalents for nominal favors, and yet of being reproached with ingratitude for not giving more. There can be no greater error than to expect, or calculate upon real favors from nation to nation. It is an illusion which experience must cure, which a just pride ought to discard.

"In offering to you, my countrymen, these counsels . . . I dare not hope they will make the strong and lasting impression I could wish; that they will control the usual current of the passions, or prevent our nation from running the course which has hitherto marked the destiny of nations, but if I may even flatter myself that they may be productive of some partial benefit, some occasional good; that they may now and then recur to moderate the fury of party spirit, to warn against the mischiefs of foreign intrigue, to guard against the impostures of pretended patriotism; this hope will be a full recompense for the solicitude for your welfare by which they have been dictated. . . ."

Washington's Farewell Address outlines the policies which enabled America to survive and become a great nation — the *only* policies which can save us today.

We must elect members of Congress and a President who will take this *only* road out of the mess our nation is in. If we cannot elect the President we need, we can at least elect statesmen to Congress; and Congress has constitutional authority to compel the President to do what must be done.

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